


20

WILLIAM OSLER'S PHILOSOPHY

BY
LUDWIG EDELSTEIN

[Reprinted from *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. XX, No. 2, July, 1946.]



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Wellcome Library

<https://archive.org/details/b30632298>

WILLIAM OSLER'S PHILOSOPHY

LUDWIG EDELSTEIN

In many of the addresses which Osler delivered in the course of his academic career, he touched upon general problems that lie beyond the pale of medicine. In some of these lectures he even was entirely, or primarily, concerned with nonmedical matters, questions of conduct and knowledge.¹ To be sure, he did not approach such topics in a systematic way. His utterances always retained the color of the impromptu and apropos. Nevertheless one has the feeling that his remarks were determined by a definite view of life, by a certain philosophy that binds them together.

It is true, Osler's own statements on this subject seem to contradict such an impression. At the end of his life he asserted: "I have never succeeded in mastering philosophy—cheerfulness was always breaking in."² At the height of his career he had stated that he was "neither a philosopher nor the son of a philosopher," and, if in the same breath he confessed to having a "philosophy of life" which he called "as frankly pragmatic as that of the shepherd in *As You Like It*," he was satisfied with defining it in the terms used by this Shakespearean character: "I am a true labourer; I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, content with my harm, and the greatest of my pride (to paraphrase Corin's words) is to see my patients get well, and my students work."³ This definition of his attitude toward life is hardly one that could stand the test of philosophical scrutiny, and in its lack of technical phraseology and flavor it gives support to those who deny that Osler can be credited with any interest in philosophy proper. Thus Cushing tends to contrast Osler "practising his own philosophy and largely unconscious of self" with the "philosopher-in-precept," and Major

¹ I am referring to the essays published by Osler himself in 1904 under the title *Aequanimitas* (in the following I quote from the 8th impression [1928] of the second edition of 1906); and to *Science and Immortality* (1904), *The Student Life* (1905), *Man's Redemption of Man* (1910), *A Way of Life* (1913), published under the title, *The Student Life and Other Essays*, by Sir William Osler, ed. by H. H. Bashford (Constable's Miscellany), 1928; and finally, *The Old Humanities and the New Science*, 1920.

² *Old Humanities*, 54 f.

³ *Student Life*, 105 and note 2 (the reference is to Act III, Scene II, 72-76; the dialogue here turns on the difference between courtly life and that of the shepherd, the representative of the natural life); cf. also *ibid.*, 76 and below pp. 286 f.

Greenwood maintains that Osler had no use even "for philosophies in medicine; at least for any philosophies but his own. That was quite simple. One observed and experimented."⁴ I readily grant that Osler never put on the robe of the professional philosopher, that he always was and remained a physician. Yet one who does not master philosophy may still be a student of it and may have pondered carefully the implications of his views, the reasons that can be advanced for or against them. At any rate, it is permissible to ask whether his opinions are consistent and how they are related to the main systems of thought current in his time. By considering these questions as regards Osler, and by analyzing his opinions in more detail, one should at least achieve a clearer appreciation of his thought.

I.

The earliest document that fully delineates Osler's views is the first essay in the collection of his papers which he himself published in 1904. The address dates from 1889. Osler was then a mature man with settled opinions. His position at that time will become more understandable, I think, if one tries first to ferret out how his ideas developed and what influences shaped his mind in the formative years of his life.

The son of a clergyman and himself bent on studying theology, Osler grew up in an intensely religious atmosphere. The books with which he was most familiar in his early youth undoubtedly were the Bible and the writings dealing with divine subjects which predominated in his father's library. On the other hand, he also found there the works of his uncle Osler, the naturalist doctor, and he studied them too. Even late in life he recalled the "amazing veneration" which he cherished for his relative.¹ In the same way, during his boarding-school days, natural investigations went hand in hand with theological reading and instruction. Osler, while a boy of 15 or 16, still was notably proficient "in that greatest of books, the Bible."² But Father Johnson, his beloved teacher, was as much a naturalist as he was a theologian; he "followed the seasons of Nature no less ardently than those of the Church." To him, as to so many of his generation and training, God's greatness revealed itself in His creation, no less

⁴ H. Cushing, *The Life of Sir William Osler*, II, 1925, 120; Major Greenwood, *The Medical Dictator*, 1936, 162. E. G. Reid, *The Great Physician*, 1931, does not seem to pay any attention to Osler's philosophy, nor do those many short appreciations of Osler published after his death, of which I perused a fair number. O. Clark, *Sir William Osler e sua philosophia* (1842-1919) in *Brasil Medico*, 35, 1921, 338-340, in spite of the title, is but a biographical account.

¹ Cushing, I, 16.

² *Ibid.*, 25.

than in His scripture. Osler thus was encouraged to acquire thorough knowledge of natural phenomena, and it was mainly Lyell and Dana who interpreted the world of nature for both teacher and pupil.³

After Osler had entered college, and after he had decided to study medicine, natural studies, of course, predominated; and though the broader issues were not lost sight of, merely religious schooling or controversy apparently became less attractive to him. To the Reverend Professor Bevan who was entrusted with the privilege of "directing the minds of the thinking youths at the Provincial University into proper philosophical channels . . . the hungry sheep looked up and were not fed." Like certain others, Osler preferred to reason with Bovell, the Professor of Natural Theology and Lecturer in Medicine, on "Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate, Fixed Fate, Freewill, Foreknowledge absolute."⁴ In these debates the theological and scientific arguments attracted him. Of philosophy the student learned little from his teacher. Bovell did not succeed in making him read Locke or Berkeley, Kant or Hegel, Spinoza or Descartes, or any of the moderns. He was only able to kindle through his lectures some interest in Cousin, Jouffroy and others of the French school.⁵

While Osler was in college, Darwin's theories were in the ascendancy. *The Origin of Species* had appeared ten years after he was born; the *Origin of Man* came out in the year of his graduation. Bovell, caught in the storm "which shook the scientific world with the publication of the *Origin of Species*," had "sought a harbour of refuge in writing a work on Natural Theology;" he was one of the "really devout students." In his house Osler heard long debates in which the attempt was made "to reconcile Genesis and Geology."⁶ There is no evidence that Osler became an adherent of the new gospel. He does not seem to have made a decision either way. Once, when his thoughts were engrossed with his examinations and with his future, he picked up a volume of Carlyle and found on the page he opened the familiar sentence: "Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand."⁷ This "common place sentiment" took hold of his imagination. It started him, as he says

³ *Ibid.*, 34 ff.; especially 37. For Johnson, cf. *An Alabama Student* etc., 1908, 248.

⁴ Cushing, I, 69.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 62 f.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 68, 62.

⁷ *Student Life*, 80; cf. Cushing, I, 81; II, 354. The quotation is from the beginning of Carlyle's essay "Signs of the Times" and reads somewhat differently: "Our grand business undoubtedly is, not to *see* what lies dimly at a distance, but to *do* what lies clearly at hand."

in 1910, on his lifelong habit of utilizing to the full the talent entrusted to him. At the moment when he read the words, they may have meant more to him. For although in his dissertation he politely bowed before the wisdom of the theologians,⁸ he was perhaps already impregnated with scepticism. From his boyhood he had been impressed by Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, which, as he noted late in life, combined daring scepticism with humble faith in the Christian religion: the author has run through all systems but has found no rest in any. The saying of Carlyle likewise may have been taken by him as an admonition to renounce far-reaching religious or philosophical speculations.⁹

However that may be, the break with the past came with Osler's visit to London in the year 1872 immediately after he had received his degree. London University, in the eighties of the last century, was an "infidel foundation" where "infidel ideas" were preached, Johnson complained in 1876, "a dangerous school. . . . Unquestionably W. Osler shews it was so to him." Johnson leaves no doubt as to the provenience of those infidel ideas with which one was indoctrinated at London: they were those of "Darwin, Huxley and Co."¹⁰ Osler in fact did become a follower of Huxley, an agnostic. As early as 1882 it must have been common knowledge that he had turned apostate. For, as an anecdote has it, the father of a young lady whom he courted objected to a son-in-law with agnostic leanings and no visible means of support.¹¹

It is difficult to ascertain the steps by which Osler worked out his new philosophy or to describe exactly the extent to which he accepted the new dogma. His public utterances made before 1889 rarely deal with general problems. The Valedictory Address of 1875 is mainly concerned with medical education; Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* is referred to but casually. In the Introductory Lecture of 1877, Carlyle is quoted, and the speaker bids the students to "banish the future and live for the hour."¹² The teacher Osler, then, seems to have been preoccupied with his own

⁸ Cushing, I, 85. Note the words: "In that Trinity of being—of body mind and soul . . . each one has its own special ills and diseases . . . those of the third class [sc. of the soul] beyond a Physician's skill seek aid elsewhere."

⁹ Even if Osler did not read on, the title of the essay would have directed his thought to more general considerations. The essay itself embodies Carlyle's gospel of work and glorifies action as contrasted with speculation. For Carlyle, cf. also below p. 287. For Thomas Browne and Osler's relation to him, cf. Cushing, I, 50, 73; *Alabama Student*, 248, 273, 275.

¹⁰ Cushing, I, 147 f.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, 201. Osler started reading Huxley in high school; *ibid.*, 34.

¹² *Ibid.*, I, 129, 157.

field and with moral problems. His letters, however, allow at least a glance at his continuing interest in the relationship between theology and the doctrine of evolution. He reads Mivart's *Lessons from Nature*, a book which Johnson considered a refutation of Darwin and Huxley,—probably siding with Huxley who severely criticized the work and pointed out its errors.¹³ Moreover, close attention is paid to the discussion of Darwin's theories by the great scientists of the day. When again in Europe, Osler writes approvingly about Virchow's defence of Darwin against Haeckel.¹⁴ Later, in Philadelphia, as a member of the Biological Club, patterned after Huxley's famous X Club, Osler must have found ample opportunity himself to discourse on the implications of agnosticism and to listen to the discourses of others, among them Leidy who, as Cushing puts it, was "Osler's chief delight at these meetings."¹⁵

On the other hand, resolute and courageous as the acceptance of the infidel philosophy was, the process by which it was brought about was a painful one. Osler himself has given eloquent testimony to the hard struggle that beset his generation which, educated in the tenets of Christianity, was confronted with the discoveries of Darwin—and, as he later added, with the results of a critical study of the biblical texts—that destroyed the belief in Divine Revelation. With the passion and knowledge of one who participated in the fight he has described the suffering of those who lived "from the days when faith was diversified with doubt, to the present days, when doubt is diversified with faith."¹⁶ Moreover, Osler's own attitude toward Christianity never was quite in conformity with his new creed. Shortly after his return from London where, according to Johnson, he had imbibed his infidel ideals, he performed the last offices of Christian friendship, "as the son of a clergyman," and read the Commendatory Prayer at the deathbed of a young man who was a chance acquaintance.¹⁷ He certainly felt impelled by his newly gained insight to give up many articles of the faith. Nevertheless he remained a Christian, not only in name, but also in his heart. Throughout his whole development he may have believed what he states as his considered opinion in 1894: "The shackles of dogma have been removed, and faith herself, freed from a morganatic alliance, finds in the release great gain."¹⁸ Again, from the beginning,

¹³ Cushing, I, 147-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 214.

¹⁵ Cushing, I, 243 f.

¹⁶ *Student Life*, 121; cf. 119, also 58; *Old Humanities*, 6 ff. In *Aequanimitas*, Darwin's contributions alone are mentioned, e. g. 94 f.

¹⁷ Cushing, I, 136.

¹⁸ *Aequanimitas*, 100; for the criticism of Christianity, cf. below p. 288.

Osler held certain reservations in regard to Huxley's doctrine of the freedom of will. In 1882 he undertakes investigations of the brain and tries to decide whether the thinking organ is an "automaton." Contrary to a claim recently made, the existence of "criminal automata" is denied; it is stressed that even Huxley, the proponent of the automaton theory, demands punishment of the criminal regardless of the question of responsibility, and Osler obviously is one of those who, like the majority of people, for a long time to come will believe in freedom of will though they are inconsistent in doing so.¹⁹ Finally, this follower of Darwin and Huxley was never satisfied with biological doctrines and natural studies. Even in these early years the reading of literature was to him indispensable. He took up Holmes and Newman and John Brown's *Horae Subsecivae*; he delved into Plato and Shakespeare, Shelley and Keats.²⁰ He was apparently searching for another, a higher inspiration.

II.

To turn now to Osler's mature thoughts, as they are embodied in those essays which he himself thought worth reprinting and making available to the public at large—the first, giving to the whole collection its name, unambiguously avows his adherence to the agnosticism of Huxley and his circle. Having advocated imperturbability of body and equanimity of mind as the essential conditions for a proper fulfillment of the physician's task, he admits that knowledge of the Absolute is unattainable: "Uncertainty . . . pertains not alone to our science and art, but to the very hopes and fears which make us men."¹ Five years later, in 1894, he glorifies Leidy as the great example of the scientist. He was not a sceptic as far as the facts of science are concerned, but he was one as regards "the ultra-rational," a scepticism that was indicative of "an influence of science which has attracted much attention and aroused discussion."² The last words of this statement betray the unpopularity that still attached to the philosophy accepted by Leidy and his admirer.

With the epistemological implications and difficulties of agnosticism, Osler, it seems, is nowhere concerned. Rather does he concentrate on the consequences that have issued from the theory of evolution conceived

¹⁹ "On the Brains of Criminals," *Canada Medical and Surgical Journal*, 1882, 15 f. Shakespeare's Iago is quoted as best expressing the "inconsistent" view. Cf. also Cushing, I, 187, 195 f. (also 207, 291 f.); and below p. 281. For Huxley, cf. *Aphorisms and Reflections*, ed. by H. A. Huxley, 1908, CCLVII-VIII, CCVII.

²⁰ Cushing, I, 210, 225, 204 f. (cf. 513), 265. Cf. also below pp. 278 f.

¹ *Aequanimitas*, 7.

² *Ibid.*, 87.

by Darwin. For this theory "has revolutionized every department of human thought," and "in no way has biological science so widened the thoughts of men as in its application to social problems."³ When in 1894 Osler discusses the social question, he puts the problem as it has been formulated by Benjamin Kidd in his book on *Social Evolution*, a treatise which appeared in the same year and immediately made a great stir in America and England. One must ask, he holds, whether the struggle for existence is to continue indefinitely or whether the dreams of the millennium are capable of realization. In different terms, one must ask whether acquired qualities can be transmitted from one generation to the other by inheritance, whether Lamarck or Weissman is right. Depending on the answer to these questions, science will have to understand "all the phenomena of human life, individual, political, social, and religious," one way or the other.⁴ Osler does not commit himself in the scientific terminology which he himself has used, but his position is unmistakable. Science, "the last gift of the gods," has no message of hope for the human race as a whole. Law, order, the *civitas Dei* in the *regnum hominis* will never come. Science "has done much, and will do more, to alleviate the unhappy condition in which so many millions of our fellow-creatures live," especially by mitigating diseases. It contributes to the education of the individual, strengthens "the sinews of the understanding," and, "working in the individual, leavens in some slight degree the whole social fabric. Reason is at least free, or nearly so." But salvation is beyond the reach of man. "No leaven, earthly or divine, has worked any permanent change in him. . . . Who runs may read the scroll which reason has placed as a warning over the human menageries: 'chained, not tamed.'" For the passions of man, the irresistible forces of the human heart, never change.⁵

Osler, then, does not believe in the gospel of a natural evolution of society and morals. Like Kidd, to whose book he gives such a prominent place in his discussion of the problems involved, he is in opposition to Spencer. With this philosopher it was axiomatic that conditions and men will, and do change for the better in course of time, though he foresaw a decline of the good once the optimum had been reached. Nor does Osler agree with Spencer's American apostle, Fiske, for whom ethical progress is rooted in biological evolution itself. A certain courage was needed in the

³ *Ibid.*, 94 f.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 95-97. For Kidd and his book, cf. R. Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 1944, 80 ff.

⁵ The quotations are taken from *Aequanimitas*, 98-100; the sequence of the sentences is slightly changed.

America of 1894 to reject the Spencerian belief in progress. It had pervaded the country almost to the exclusion of any other gospel; it was upheld even by the law courts as if it expressed the laws of nature. Even in 1905 Justice Holmes, in one of his famous dissenting opinions, could expostulate: "The Fourteenth Amendment does not enact Mr. Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics*." ⁶

I do not mean to imply that Osler denied moral progress altogether. Two years before he gave his verdict against the theory of natural evolution, in 1892, he had said: "The ideal State, the ideal Life, the ideal Church—what they are and how best to realize them—such dreams continue to haunt the minds of men, and who can doubt that their contemplation greatly assists the upward progress of our race?" ⁷ For throughout history the things that are great have been accomplished by those who were inspired by ideals. "Moving in a world not realized," men sought to express their conceptions in deeds, and these deeds are wondrous because they are "but the outward and visible signs of the ideals which animated them." ⁸ Osler, then, does acknowledge a certain evolution of ethics, in spite of his pessimism as to its final results; and this progress, he maintains, as far as it can be brought about at all, depends on human ideals, on human thought.

In taking such a stand, Osler deviates from the position taken by Kidd. For Kidd invoked religion and altruism as helpers in the fight for improvement, the one being that power in man which is in conflict with his own reason, the other that which is super-rational.⁹ It is more important to note that Osler, the adherent of Huxley's agnosticism, disagrees with the master in his interpretation of moral and social phenomena. Even in his Romanes Lectures of 1894, Huxley appeals to law and morals as restraints upon the struggle for existence between men in society; betterment, he upholds, is achieved by "a constant struggle to maintain and improve, in opposition to the State of Nature, the State of Art of an organized polity." Otherwise, "the best," who are by no means identical with the "fittest," cannot survive. Natural affection and sympathy, an

⁶ S. E. Morison and H. St. Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic*, 1934, 713. For Spencer, e. g. Hofstadter, 18 ff.; for Fiske, *ibid.*, 151 ff. Osler owned a copy of Spencer's *Social Statics* (*Bibliotheca Osleriana*, 1929, no. 1612).

⁷ *Acquanimitas*, 42; for the limitations of progress cf. below p. 289.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 41 f. Osler exemplifies his view by reference to the works of artists. I have transposed the arguments to human accomplishments in general, since it is clear from the context that the words were meant to be thus understood.

⁹ For Kidd, cf. Hofstadter, 81.

innate sense of moral beauty and ugliness, are the only safeguards of ethics.¹⁰ Huxley continues to think in biological and universal terms. Osler argues in spiritual categories and from the point of view of the individual.

The physician, his agnosticism notwithstanding, obviously clings to a theory of the nature of man that is radically different from that of the scientist. For Huxley, consciousness is but a collateral product of the mechanism of the body, completely without any power of modifying the working of its machinery. The passions must and can be trained to cooperate in harmony with the laws of Nature, comprehended by the intellect.¹¹ Osler, long before 1894, had rejected the automaton doctrine of Huxley and avowed his belief in the freedom of will, however inconsistent such a belief may be with other data.¹² He considers head and heart, intellect and passions, the two great antagonists in man. On the one side, there is the intellect which in scientific endeavor analyzes facts, or in theoretical contemplation devises ever-changing ideals. On the other side, there are the human passions, unalterable throughout the history of mankind and never to be justified or controlled by science. Moreover, both head and heart are productive of action. The passions furnish the more important motives, for it is "the human heart by which we live," but we are also driven on by our dreams, our ideals.¹³ In consequence of such a divergence, Huxley and Osler are at variance also in their concepts of education and culture. While for Huxley liberal education is provided by science, and while for him the judgment of truth is derived from scientific research rather than from books,¹⁴ Osler consistently maintains the value of literary studies. As early as 1894 he praises Leidy who did not experience "'the curious and lamentable loss of the higher aesthetic taste' which Darwin mourned."¹⁵ A speech given in 1903 elaborates on this assertion. Man needs a higher education which his daily work, his scientific training do not give him. It is, moreover, "no longer intrinsic, wrought in us and ingrained," it can be achieved only through individual effort. "Personal contact with men of high purpose and character will help a man to make

¹⁰ For Huxley, cf. Hofstadter, 77 f.; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., s. v., 20b.

¹¹ T. H. Huxley, *Science and Education*, 1894, 83, 86; cf. below n. 17.

¹² Cf. above p. 275.

¹³ *Aequanimitas*, 4 f., 99.

¹⁴ Cf. in general "A Liberal Education," [1868], in *Science and Education*, 76 ff.; and also the Inaugural Address delivered in 1876 at the Johns Hopkins University, *American Addresses*, 1886, 99 ff. The belles lettres are considered only "the greatest of all sources of refined pleasure"; *Science and Education*, 109.

¹⁵ *Aequanimitas*, 88.

a start—to have the desire, at least, but in its fulness this culture—for that word best expresses it—has to be wrought out by each one for himself.” And it is through books that the aim is attained. One should read Job and David, Isaiah and St. Paul, Shakespeare, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, Plato, Montaigne and many other “literary heroes.” Thus, and thus alone can one hope to acquire “wisdom in life.”¹⁶

If Osler's assumptions concerning the nature of man, his possibilities and aims, may be related at all to any of the philosophical or psychological doctrines of Osler's time, then it is, as far as I can judge, the doctrine of his great contemporary William James to which one must make reference. In his *Psychology*, James has refuted Huxley's automaton theory as he has also opposed the view of Clifford for whom the mind is an epiphenomenon of the body. Instead, he has tried to show that the brain, the instrument of possibilities, is endowed with causal efficacy, that it is a conscious fighter for ends. Judgments of the “should-be” he holds to be as real as judgments of fact.¹⁷ Moreover, James has proved against the natural view, as he calls it, that in emotions, in the coarser ones no less than in the more subtle ones, it is the sounding board of the body that is at work. Bodily changes, not mental perceptions, are the cause of passions. Head and heart are then two powers, independent of each other, yet of equal importance for man's actions.¹⁸ Finally, James is convinced of the immutability of the human heart. The progress of society, in his opinion, is limited by this very fact, although he admits that improvement of evil conditions is bound to be achieved.¹⁹ And he pleads that man should not dig the grave of his “higher possibilities” by neglecting poetry, spiritual reading, meditation, music, pictures or philosophy. In confirmation of the necessity of reading, he quotes a passage from Darwin's autobiography—a passage “which has often been quoted”—in which Darwin suggests that “the loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.”²⁰

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 383-5, and note on 475; cf. also *Alabama Student*, 276 f.

¹⁷ W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, I, 1896 [1890], 129 ff.; for Huxley and Clifford, *ibid.*, 131 f. Cf. also *Collected Essays and Reviews*, 1920, 66 f. [1878].

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 449 ff.; especially 470-472; also 578.

¹⁹ Cf. below p. 289.

²⁰ *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, 1901 [1889], 71 f. That Osler knew this book is certain, cf. below p. 282. For the importance of emulation to which Osler refers, cf. *ibid.*, 49 ff., and *Psychology*, II, 579: “But just as our courage is so often a reflex of another's courage, so our faith is apt to be, as Max Müller somewhere says, a faith in someone else's faith. We draw new life from the heroic example.”

From all that has been said, it seems to me, only one conclusion can be drawn. Osler, in the period between 1889 and 1904, although he was a follower of Huxley in so far as to him the Absolute is the Unknowable, in his outlook on man and on society was a Jamesian rather than a Huxlerian.

III

Before proceeding to Osler's later writings I must discuss a topic that has some bearing on the characteristic of his point of view given just now, and on the interpretation of his later addresses as well, namely, Osler's relationship to James. I have labelled the Osler of *Aequanimitas* a Jamesian. Was he familiar with James' work, or is the agreement with his ideas accidental? James' name does not seem to be mentioned in any of the papers written and published before 1904. It is only in this same year, in his Ingersoll Lecture, which is not included in the collection *Aequanimitas*, that Osler refers to James. He praises him as the man who has studied, in a singularly lucid way, one of the most important facts in man's history: the irreconcilable hostility which from the standpoint of science, representing the head, exists in regard to the emotional or cardiac side of life's problems.¹ That Osler was conscious of his agreement with James, then, is certain; he could hardly have spoken about him as he did, had his own essays, which were just coming out of the press, exhibited a contrary opinion. But the question arises whether in his earlier years Osler learned from James, or whether the tribute paid to him is merely the recognition of a spiritual kinship discovered later on.

The decision is not an easy one to make. Osler in 1892 gives the impression that his understanding of the value of ideals came to him in a moment of inspiration while he was admiring the beauty and splendor of a work of art. Moreover, in 1894 in his interpretation of human passions, he quotes Marion Crawford as "a student of the heart of man, a depicter of his emotions," as if he intended to make him his authority.² I cannot imagine that Osler seriously meant to imply that from this average novelist, renowned and acclaimed as he was in his day, he learned the nature of the human heart and its relationship to reason. Many another great poet whom he knew could have taught him the same lesson. I find it equally

¹ *Student Life*, 133 f.

² *Aequanimitas*, 41 f., 99. For Crawford, cf. V. L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, III, 1930, 171 f., cf. 237; and *Dictionary of American Biography*, s. v. I have not thought it necessary to peruse the numerous writings of Crawford in order to identify the book and page to which Osler refers.

unconvincing that the scientist Osler, the pupil of Huxley, could be indebted to his own inspiration for an understanding of the working of the human intellect that differs so greatly from that of his master. Osler's anatomical investigations into the brain show clearly on what grounds he really based his dissent.³

But even if one feels one may safely disregard Osler's own comments on the sources of his philosophy, one must nevertheless admit that opinions such as those held by him in regard to man's nature may derive from many different systems or may simply summarize one's experience. In Osler's case, their similarity to those of James may be due to a similarity of the temperaments of the two men, or to some presuppositions which they had in common. Both Osler and James were deeply influenced by Carlyle's philosophy of work, both indulged in hero worship and believed that history was made by great men.⁴ Granted all this, it remains unlikely that Osler, the insatiable reader who closely followed the contemporary scientific and philosophical debates, should not have been acquainted with James' *Psychology* published in 1890, and the many previous and later essays which had made him well known. One should also suppose that the studies of James, who was a scientist and was trained in medicine, must have had a special appeal for the scientist and physician Osler, and I for one cannot believe that they were not instrumental in shaping Osler's thought.⁵

However that may be, there remains the agreement with James which Osler himself notes, and there is, from 1904 on, friendship between the two men and, on the part of Osler, a continuous interest in James' philosophy which now developed into its final form of pragmatism. As for their personal relations, there is a possibility that Osler had met James as early as 1879.⁶ At any rate, during the last years of James' life, he and Osler were rather close to each other. In 1908, Osler invites James to be

³ Cf. above p. 275.

⁴ For Osler's hero worship (as he called it himself), cf. Cushing, I, 266. For Carlyle, cf. above p. 272. Osler quoted the Carlyle passage for the first time in 1877 (Cushing, *ibid.*, 157); cf. also *Aequanimitas*, 110; 473. For James, cf. *Great Men and Their Environment* [1880] in *The Will to Believe*, 1897, 216 ff. For James' relation to Carlyle, cf. R. B. Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 1936, especially I, 145 f., 159, 464 f.; II, 271, 274, 673 (I owe these references to the kindness of Professor A. O. Lovejoy).

⁵ In the introduction to James' *Psychology*, it is stressed that he has "kept close to the point of view of natural science throughout the book" (I, V), and it is also pointed out that several chapters were published before (*ibid.*, VII).

⁶ Cushing, I, 174; the reference is to the collection of W. James' letters where, however, Osler is not mentioned.

his guest while staying in Oxford to deliver the Hibbert Lectures. In 1910 James gives Osler a detailed account of his state of health and promises further reports, while Osler again comments on James' health in letters to other people.⁷ Nor does it need a special occasion or contact to remind Osler of James. Congratulating a friend on his engagement, he jokingly expresses the wish that James would study "the mental state of man a few weeks after acceptance." When in Paris attending a lecture of Bergson, he hears the French philosopher praise James and finds this an important enough event to be relayed to Boston.⁸

How far Osler was acquainted with James' philosophy one can in part conclude from the books preserved in his library. He owned copies of *Pragmatism* and *Some Problems of Philosophy*, the speech on Agassiz, and in addition several monographs on James of which the article by Putnam is described in a letter as most interesting.⁹ It would, however, be wrong to suppose that Osler knew no works other than those in his possession. The quotation from James in Osler's lecture of 1913 is taken from the *Talks to Students*, published in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*.¹⁰ Moreover, while on a short visit to America in 1906, Osler listened to James' "remarkable" lecture on the *Energies of Men*, the contents of which he vividly recalled in 1915.¹¹ Osler also attended James' lecture course on *A Pluralistic Universe*, in which one remark, as he said a year later, struck him particularly: "We live forward, we understand backwards."¹² There is, of course, no way of calculating how many more of James' essays or books Osler read without mentioning them or referring to them later. But even from the few data preserved the fact emerges that Osler was familiar with almost all the important writings belonging to James' pragmatic period and with some dating from earlier years.¹³

To be sure, there are many books which Osler read and quoted, there are many great people whom he knew and praised, but his interest in James seems outstanding. The epithets given to this philosopher have an

⁷ For James' letters, cf. Appendix, below pp. 292 f. It appears that Osler gave medical advice also to James' daughter. For further comment on James' health, cf. Cushing, II, 218.

⁸ Cushing, II, 183, 156.

⁹ *Bibliotheca Osleriana*, no. 3074-3078, 6569; for Putnam, cf. Cushing, II, 258.

¹⁰ Compare *Student Life*, 92 f., with *Talks to Teachers*, 214.

¹¹ Cushing, II, 491 (and W. James, *Memories and Studies*, 1911, 229 ff.).

¹² Compare Cushing, II, 177, with James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 1909, 244. James quotes the words that so impressed Osler from a "Danish Writer" (Kierkegaard) when he is discussing the relation of the intellect to life. He must himself have been impressed by the quotation, for it occurs also in *Pragmatism*, 1907, 223 (chapter on Truth).

¹³ As for James' later works, only his *Radical Empiricism* is not mentioned; for earlier books, cf. p. 279; for *The Will to Believe*, cf. below p. 285.

unusual ring, especially considering the circumstance that he was still alive when he was thus honored. In 1904 Osler called James "one recognised everywhere as a master in Israel."¹⁴ He was speaking at Harvard, where most of James' work was done, and for a moment one might be inclined to take the commendation as a polite bow before Harvard's great son. But years afterwards, and this time at Yale, he again called James a "master in Israel." Still later, in his catholic taste for cultures and races, Osler referred to James as the "American Socrates."¹⁵ Surely, an influence of James on Osler's thought as it is embodied in his later addresses is a factor which the interpreter is allowed, even obliged, to take seriously.

IV

The second group of Osler's speeches comprises those given between 1904 and 1919. Of them the lecture on *Science and Immortality* comes first chronologically, and it is perhaps also the most interesting paper on account of its subject matter and on account of the change in Osler's attitude which it betrays. For a long time Osler had hesitated to accept the invitation to deliver the Ingersoll Lecture. Did he feel that he was not yet prepared to discuss with assurance so vast an issue? When he at last consented to speak "before a Boston audience on such an impossible subject as Immortality," he labored on the address perhaps more than on any other which he had ever given.¹

As the title itself indicates, the lecture was to discuss the topic from the point of view of science. In the preface Osler reiterated his intention "to approach the problem from the standpoint of a man, part at least of whose training has been in the habit and faculty of observation, as Aristotle defines science."² The result arrived at is simple and expressed with clarity and forthrightness: "Knowing nothing of an immortality of the spirit, science has put on an immortality of the flesh;" the generating substance alone can be considered eternal.³ In 1904 such a statement, regardless of its correctness or falsity, was not without broader implications. During the preceding years attempts had been made to prove the immortality of the soul scientifically. The investigations of F. W. H. Myers and of his Society for Psychical Research were much in vogue; they had received the friendly acclaim of James. Osler dismisses them with a shrug of the shoulders. He also refutes by implication James'

¹⁴ *Student Life*, 133 f. and note.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 92, and Cushing, II, 491.

¹ Cushing, I, 598, 638.

² *Student Life*, 105.

³ *Ibid.*, 127-129.

endeavors to remove scientific objections to the assumption of immortality and the contentions of pragmatists like Schiller that the possibility of a scientific proof of the existence of the soul must be acknowledged.⁴ Nay, he proceeds to show that, contrary to the claims recently made, from the point of view of science even the reality of the problem at stake must be questioned. A few years before Osler's talk, the American Branch of the Society for Psychical Research had issued a questionnaire that was meant "to determine the nature of men's actual sentiments and actual bias" in regard to death. Schiller had expressed his hope that this inquiry, even if the majority of people should prove to be indifferent in the matter, would stimulate interest in the problem and thus make it a real one; for to him even the possibility of knowledge depended on the "social atmosphere." The answers to the questionnaire were critically discussed by Schiller in 1904.⁵ Osler, on the evidence of his own research which he had begun long ago, denies that men of his generation, even in the last hours of life, are still troubled by any concern with immortality. It thus appears that the scientist, unable as he is to give a positive solution of the problem, is also dealing with a sham question.⁶

President Eliot, so the story goes, had long wished that a physician should discuss the subject of immortality, and when he invited Welch to do so and the latter refused because "Science had nothing to say on the subject of immortality," Eliot answered that that was just what he wanted him to say. After Osler's speech, however, Eliot "expressed himself as greatly disappointed, for instead of hearing a scientific discourse on the subject, if there could be such a thing, he had listened merely to a brilliant and charming essay."⁷ This reaction at first seems astonishing. For one

⁴ Contrast *Student Life*, 126 f., with James, *Memories*, 145 ff. [1901], and *Human Immortality*, 1898, 24 f. (Ingersoll Lecture); cf. also F. C. S. Schiller, *Humanism*, 1903, 288 (the book was in Osler's possession [*Bibliotheca Osleriana*, no. 5422]; the editors rightly draw attention to the fact that the three last papers deal with immortality). Incidentally, the two references to Schiller in Cushing, II, 515, 559, concern the pragmatist Schiller; the index lists the references under F. von Schiller (p. 559 deals with Schiller's paper in *Studies in the History and Method of Science*, ed. by C. Singer, I, 1917, 235 ff; which of the medical papers of Schiller is referred to on p. 515, I cannot say).

⁵ The questionnaire is reprinted in Schiller, *Humanism*, 243-245; cf. 228, n. 1. For Schiller's own views, *ibid.*, 245, 248 f. Osler possessed the collected answers (*Bibliotheca Osleriana*, no. 5423).

⁶ *Student Life*, 117. For Osler's investigations, cf. also Cushing, I, 294, who stresses Osler's deep philosophical interest in the problem of death, and notes that a great number of his books concerned this question.

⁷ Cushing, I, 597, 639. Eliot approved only that part of the speech in which Osler spoke of the last sensations of the dying (*ibid.*, I, 639).

would think that Osler had succeeded, and succeeded well, in doing what Welch had considered impossible: to fill an hour with saying that science has nothing to say upon the subject. The main reason for Eliot's disappointment is to be found, I think, in the fact that at the end of his address Osler suddenly turns about and pronounces judgment in favor of the belief in immortality. After wandering through all the phases of indifference, scepticism, and hope, he says, some people at last will come "to the opinion of Cicero, who had rather be mistaken with Plato than be in the right with those who deny altogether the life after death; and this is my own *confessio fidei*." ⁸

Such an avowal of faith comes indeed as a disappointing anticlimax. For a moment one might be inclined to take it as a charming inconsistency such as Osler had already permitted himself in 1882 in regard to the problem of human freedom.⁹ But in the Ingersoll Lecture Osler does not betray any trace of bad conscience; he boldly asserts his belief, and this in spite of the fact that he himself has proved that the basis for a scientific decision is lacking. How can this attitude be explained which so little becomes a scientist, not to mention an agnostic, and which is expressed not in terms of religious language but in those of a philosophical creed? It can only be understood if one remembers the teaching of that man who, as Osler admits in the same lecture, has most profoundly studied "the cardiac side of life's problems" which is opposed to the head, the representative of science.¹⁰ James had insisted that in all "living options" man cannot afford doubt. He had attacked Huxley and Clifford who held that it is not permissible to believe where the evidence is insufficient, that under such circumstances doubt is the only honorable attitude. In 1897 he had defended the cause of the will to believe, or of the right to believe as he phrased it later on, especially addressing himself to "academic audiences."¹¹ Osler's confession of faith, I suggest, reflects the Jamesian position. At least since the year 1901 he had shown great interest in the importance of faith for all activities of life. His survey of *Medicine in the Nineteenth Century* stresses the relation of faith to medical healing, of faith that after all, he says, is the "great lever of life." In 1903 he warns the students against trying to mix the waters of science with "the oil of faith." But "you can have a great deal of both if you only keep them

⁸ *Student Life*, 138.

⁹ Cf. above p. 275.

¹⁰ *Student Life*, 133; cf. above p. 280.

¹¹ *Will to Believe*, 7 f., 18 and Preface, X. In *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 1911, 221, James speaks of "Faith and the Right to Believe."

separate. The worry comes from the attempt at mixture.”¹² When in 1904 he speaks out for the belief in immortality, though it is unwarranted by the scientific evidence, he does so because he has come to realize fully the significance and permissibility of belief, even at the risk of being wrong. Avoidance of error, although a duty, is not the highest duty, and to be right in the sense that one does not accept what cannot be proved, is not the highest ideal: for, as James says, it “is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.”¹³

Osler, then, has abandoned agnosticism, he has accepted the Jamesian philosophy of belief. This change in attitude implied that sooner or later he would be driven also to embrace James’ concept of truth which is so closely interwoven with James’ psychology and brought out most poignantly in his works on pragmatism. Fundamentally, James holds, it is not so much by thinking as it is by acting that man arrives at an understanding of himself and of the world. Thought has no access to the truth of things because truth is not the copying of realities, but the working out of ideas.¹⁴ That James’ remark, “we live forward, we understand backwards,” for Osler was a “remark that clung” attests that in 1908 he was indeed on the way to interpreting the intellect in the categories of James. This pithy saying, quoted by James from the existentialist Kierkegaard, nicely summarizes the attitude of the pragmatist as well.¹⁵ In 1913 it is evident that Osler has been fully converted to the tenets of the movement to which he had given allegiance in an ever increasing measure. For to the eternally recurring question, “What is life?” Osler urges the students to give the answer: “I do not think—I act it; the only philosophy that brings you in contact with its real values and enables you to grasp its hidden meaning.” Carlyle’s distinction between what lies at a distance and what lies near at hand, of which Osler had been so fond since his youth, and the Hunterian “do not think, but try” attitude of mind, which he recommended in 1905 as “the important one to cultivate,”—both have received in the statement of 1913 the reformulation that is appropriate for the modern pragmatist.¹⁶ Osler at the beginning of his speech may still claim that he has never been worried by any philosophy higher than that of the shepherd in *As You Like It*—one must not forget that this philosophy for him, as he had said

¹² *Aequanimitas*, 272 (the return to psychical methods of cure is “a third noteworthy feature in modern treatment”), 382.

¹³ *Will to Believe*, 11, 18.

¹⁴ *Pragmatism*, e. g., 55 ff., 197 ff.

¹⁵ Cf. above p. 282.

¹⁶ *Student Life*, 95; for Carlyle cf. above p. 272; for Hunter, *Student Life*, 17.

nine years earlier, was "frankly pragmatic" ¹⁷—but the shepherd no doubt would have been aghast at the intellectual refinement, the categorical precision with which his philosophy was now characterized. He would at best have recognized the content of his creed; for the message which Osler defends is, to be sure, still the same. It is living for the day or what once he had called the Master-Word in Medicine: "Work." ¹⁸ Yet even the form in which this gospel is presented in 1913 seems deeply influenced by James' concept of truth and his consequent denial of all universally valid assertions. For it is significant, I think, that Osler speaks of his message as "a Way," an "experience," a "path," not "a system," a "habit," in short "A Way of Life." ¹⁹ As James says in the subtitle of his *Pragmatism*, this term is but "a new name for some old ways of thinking," and in the text he maintains that pragmatism "has no dogmas, and no doctrines save its method. As the young Italian pragmatist Papini has well said, it lies in the midst of our theories, like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it." ²⁰

Having accepted the epistemology of the new creed, Osler redefined also his relation to religion and to the social question in terms reminiscent of the debates that took place among the adherents of the movement, little as his attitude itself changed in regard to the issues at stake. As for Christianity, he had as early as 1903 expressed his belief that its true meaning was identical with Carlyle's demand that man be mainly concerned with the present. In proof of this contention he quoted the words from the Sermon on the Mount: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." The same words he chooses as the motto of his *Student Life* where he once more outlines the course to be followed by the practitioner and by the researcher in their daily efforts. ²¹ Eight years later, he discourses at length on his conviction that Carlyle's aphorism which had so deeply influenced him, and the Christian message aim at the same truth: "Sufficient unto the day is the goodness thereof." He takes the fact that "the workers in Christ's vineyard were hired by the day," not in the spirit of Oriental resignation or of Epicurean enjoyment, but "in the modernist spirit"—it is a call to action, "a way of life, a habit," which later on he describes by saying: "Look heavenward, if you wish, but never to the horizon—that way danger lies." ²² Jamesian as are the in-

¹⁷ *Student Life*, 105; cf. *ibid.*, 76.

¹⁹ *Student Life*, 2.

¹⁸ *Aequanimitas*, 374.

²⁰ *Pragmatism*, 54.

²¹ *Aequanimitas*, 381 (cf. also 473); *Student Life*, 2.

²² *Student Life*, 80 f., 86.

sistence on the value of habits and the phraseology used by Osler throughout this speech, such a definition of Christianity certainly was not in contradiction to James' opinion that religion concerns "the way an individual's life comes home to *him*, his intimate needs, ideals, desolations, consolations, failures, successes," whatever James' attitude toward Christianity in particular. Osler's interpretation reminds one also of Dewey's contention that Christianity in its very intentions was a pragmatic movement, yet was deflected from its predestined course because in the time of its origin there was still lacking a philosophy capable of providing the adequate theoretical formulations that were needed.²³

Apart from what Christianity may mean to the individual, however, for Osler it also had a social message which, as he thought, was only too often overlooked by his contemporaries. For "generations of ancestors, brooding over 'Providence, foreknowledge, will and fate, Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,' may have bred a New England conscience, morbidly sensitive, to heal which some of you had rather sing the 51st Psalm than follow Christ into the slums."²⁴ As he had said in 1903: "The essence of that oft-repeated admonition of Christ, 'He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it'" is "that we are here not to get all we can out of life for ourselves, but to try to make the lives of others happier." For "the law of the higher life is only fulfilled by love, i. e. charity."²⁵ But he was not afraid to add to the content of this message: the care of the body which the Greeks neglected as far as the common man was concerned and which the New Testament completely ignored, will become a main task of society.²⁶ In another mood he could speak of a new socialism of science that will arise and "with its definite mission cares not a rap for the theories of Karl Marx, of Ferdinand Lasalle, or of Henry George; still less for the dreams of Plato or of Sir Thomas More—or at least only so far as they help to realise the well-being of the citizen."²⁷ This is man's redemption of man, and it will go far indeed in mitigating the evils of the world. One might

²³ For James' attitude toward religion, cf. Perry, II, 329; cf. also 357. For his theory of habits, *Psychology*, I, 104 ff.; *Talks to Teachers*, 64 ff. For Dewey, cf. *Beliefs and Existences* [1905], in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*, 1910, 177 f. Osler had long ago expressed his belief that religion had gained by being freed from dogma, cf. above p. 274. For the Lord's Prayer to be recited by the creedless and the creed-stuffed, cf. *Student Life*, 97.

²⁴ *Student Life*, 83; cf. above p. 272.

²⁵ *Aequanimitas*, 385 f.

²⁶ *Student Life*, 54, 69.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69 f.; cf. James, *Memories*, 267 ff. (*The Moral Equivalent of War*), published the same year. James asks for general conscription in the interest of the community.

well call such a gospel a new humanism, although Osler gives its quintessence in the words of the Greek philosopher Prodicus, "that which benefits human life is God." When he selected this phrase he hardly failed to remember that other pragmatic humanism, for which Protagoras' statement, "man is the measure of all things," was the watchword.²⁸ Yet whether this socialism be Christian or scientific or humanistic, the optimistic ring of Osler's assertions must not deceive one into believing that he hoped for more than an improvement of external conditions, of material welfare, or that he would admit now that the *civitas Dei* could ever be realized in the *regnum hominis*. In the comedies and tragedies of life the immutable human nature of men of today reacts very much as in the dawn of science, though with a widening of knowledge "the lights and shadows of the landscape have shifted, and the picture is brighter."²⁹ James, too at the end of his life trusted in the socialism of the future, but he would hardly have retracted the statement which he made in 1897 in a book from which Osler quoted three years after he had given his final verdict on man's fate just referred to: "Society has, with all this, undoubtedly got to pass toward some newer and better equilibrium, and the distribution of wealth has doubtless slowly got to change: such changes have always happened, and will happen to the end of time. But if, after all that I have said, any of you expect that they will make any *genuine vital difference* on a large scale, to the lives of our descendants, you will have missed the significance of my entire lecture. The solid meaning of life is always the same eternal thing,—the marriage, namely, of some unhabitual ideal, however special, with some fidelity, courage, and endurance; with some man's or woman's pain.—And, whatever or wherever life may be, there will always be the chance for that marriage to take place."³⁰

Osler never gave assent to those who hold that the course of the things in this world, of human happiness or unhappiness, is determined by institutions rather than by man's character and will. As James had expressed it: "No outward changes of condition in life can keep the nightingale of its eternal meaning from singing in all sorts of different men's hearts. That is the main fact to remember."³¹ Perhaps it was this

²⁸ *Student Life*, 70; cf. Cushing, II, 228 f., 220 f. For Schiller, *Humanism*, XVII, 31. Osler owned a copy of Schiller's article on *Plato or Protagoras?* published in 1908 (*Bibliotheca Osleriana*, no. 226).

²⁹ *Student Life*, 69.

³⁰ *Talks to Teachers*, 298 f. For James' increasing interest in socialism after 1897, cf. M. Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators*, 1935, 438 ff.

³¹ *Talks to Teachers*, 301.

unwavering belief in the individual which allowed him to cling to his optimism, such as it was, even in the face of the disillusionment of the war years, of the annihilation of hopes and expectations which he had harbored for his age. When in 1919 he took the rostrum for the last time, he had watched men submit to hate, he had seen the discoveries of science, which can do so much to help mankind, misused for destruction.³² He still contended that a solution of all difficulties could be found. As he says, "two things are clear: there must be a very different civilization or there will be no civilization at all; and the other is that neither the old religion combined with the old learning, nor both with the new science, suffice to save a nation bent on self-destruction." Reforms are needed. "The so-called Humanists have not enough Science, and Science sadly lacks the Humanities."³³ Even if this fault is remedied, however, still more has to be done. "The gospel of the right to live, and the right to live healthy, happy lives, has sunk deep into the hearts of the people." It can become reality only if there exists in man "the love of humanity associated with the love of his craft!—philanthropia and philotechnia—the joy of working joined in each one to a true love of his brother . . . perhaps in this combination the longings of humanity may find their solution, and Wisdom-*Philosophia*—at last be justified of her children."³⁴ But how is this salvation to be achieved? In giving the answer Osler—he is addressing classicists!—appeals to Plato: "The salvation of science lies in a recognition of a new philosophy—the *scientia scientiarum* of which Plato speaks." On this "synthetic process" Osler hesitates to dwell in detail; he has not mastered philosophy.³⁵ He is quite outspoken about the salvation of man, for with Plato he has "realized that after all the true State is within, of which each one of us is the founder, and patterned on an ideal the existence of which matters not a whit. Is not the need of this individual reconstruction the Greek message to modern democracy? And with it is blended the note of individual service to the community."³⁶

I have come to the end of my interpretation of Osler's opinions. This much, I think, has been shown: it is most likely that in his early writings he was dependent on James; that he was so in his later essays is certain. Among all the contemporary philosophies that of James seems to have had the greatest bearing on Osler's thought. Of course, as James said

³² *Old Humanities*, 11 ff., 48.

³³ *Ibid.*, 19, 34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 63 f.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 54 f.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

himself, pragmatism was used in fragments by many previous thinkers; it is only its universal mission that has been recognized by him.³⁷ Osler's inclination toward pragmatism, if not merely a matter of temperament, may have been derived from many a philosophical system of the past with which he was familiar, or even from many medical authors whom he studied. Nevertheless, the influence of James, in my opinion, was decisive. For Osler's pragmatism, as it finally evolved, took on the hue of the specific modern formulation given to pragmatism by James and his followers.

I fully realize that my analysis is not exhaustive. I have paid little attention to Osler's ethical precepts which were shaped largely by his "lifelong mentor," Thomas Browne.³⁸ Especially the practical aspects of his teaching, his statements about self-education, about universities, about scholarship would deserve a more careful scrutiny. It is indeed of interest to ponder over such pronouncements as: "The present remarkable position in applied science and in industrial trades of all sorts has been made possible by men who did pioneer work in chemistry, in physics, in biology, and in physiology, without a thought in their researches of any practical application," or: "The value of a really great student to the country is equal to half a dozen grain elevators or a new transcontinental railway."³⁹ I have intended to give but a certain point of view that in my opinion must be taken into account by those who wish to understand the theoretical foundation of Osler's philosophy.

For looking back to the beginning of my discussion, I make bold to affirm that Osler had a philosophy. Any attempt to deny this in spite of the facts adduced would lead to a merely verbal argument about what is, or can be called, philosophy. Osler certainly had a consistent attitude toward life and its problems. It would also seem unjustifiable to me to dub his philosophy simple or even to restrict it to the province of medicine. It was well rounded out, it concerned itself with a multitude of general issues. If Osler himself claims that he was "neither a philosopher nor the son of a philosopher," that he "never mastered philosophy" because "cheerfulness was always breaking in," then I feel allowed to see in such assertions no more than the humility which befits him who is not an original thinker, a humility itself couched in the language of cheerfulness, of that jocular pretense so well known to Osler's friends.

³⁷ *Pragmatism*, 50.

³⁸ Cushing, II, 660; cf. *Alabama Student*, 277: "Mastery of self, conscientious devotion to duty, deep human interest in human beings—these best of all lessons you must learn now or never: and these are some of the lessons which may be gleaned from the life and from the writings of Sir Thomas Browne."

³⁹ *Student Life*, 13, 12.

APPENDIX

Two letters from James to Osler are preserved in the *Bibliotheca Osleriana*. The one is inserted in the copy of *Pragmatism* (no. 3074) and has been published by Cushing (*Life*, I, 119 f.), with the exception of the second paragraph and the ending. The other is inserted in Osler's copy of *Some Problems of Philosophy* (no. 3075) and has been hitherto unpublished. I am indebted to Dr. W. W. Francis for sending me transcripts of the letters and for allowing me to print both documents.

95 Irving St.,
Cambridge.

April 3.08

My dear Osler;

I thank you for your letter of March 24th., but listen to how it is with me! I find myself in a state of as bad nervous fatigue as I have ever been in my life, and that says a good deal. Today, e. g., awake since 2.30, and had to stop work on my 5th lecture (out of 8) after two hours because of flushed head. Three-hour-long dinner parties tire me badly; and if I succeed in getting thru my lectures themselves, I shall be lucky. This is not to *com-* but only to *ex-*plain why the notion of being "lionized" in any way whatever at Oxford strikes terror into my rabbit-like heart. So *don't* invite your London MD.'s to meet me! All that I am good for under present conditions is a few more intimate talks with old (and new) Oxford friends.

Your offer to help in lodging us is ultra kind, but I have already written to Principal Carpenter to look out for lodgings, so I won't tax you.

Don't consider me churlish, for I *ain't* but believe me with thanks and regrets,
yours very sincerely,

(signed) Wm. James

Lamb House,
Rye,
Sussex.

May 3rd. 1910

Dear Osler,

Your letter of inquiry and friendly invitation arrives on the day on which I should in any case have written to you myself, having just decided to leave here for Paris on Thursday, my wife remaining with the invalid [*sc.* Henry James].

The case as it develops becomes more and more plainly one of melancholia, 'simple' in that there are no fixed or false ideas,—apart from the remains of his belief that the 'cause' of the whole thing is diet and no functional bodily complications. The type tends to agitation rather than to taciturnity, and he fluctuates a good deal from day to day, but until yesterday had had no complete remission of anguish for 10 or 12 days. Suddenly, the night before last, he grew bright, woke without the usual trepidation etc. & had a first rate day yesterday, and is all right this morning again.

Skinner is a first rate intelligent fellow (though with no special genius for this sort of case) and thinks that any change of scene for him now is the desirable thing—and we shall work him in that direction. Of course we are prepared for a long illness, but the remissions (which to my mind seem independent of assignable outward influences) show that the disease is relatively superficial, and that the final improvement may begin at any time. I am taking short views at present! Henry has a peculiarly good relation with my wife, so I leave them with a good conscience.

My anginoid pain has increased during the past year, tho' nitro-glycerin stops it like magic. I go to Paris to consult one Dr. Montier, whose high frequency currents have performed a *wunder kur* on a neighbor of mine (reducing his arterial tension from 230^{mm} to 150 in four applications) with a relief of all his formidable symptoms, that has now been complete for six months! I know of two cases of similar relief by him, tho' I am unacquainted with the details. It sounds impossible, and I hear that M. is regarded as a quack by medical opinion. Nevertheless I don't wish to leave that stone unturned, since my own trouble (in which I gladly acknowledge an element of nervous hyperaesthesia) seems progressive. I will let you know the results!

I am postponing all social and other flurries until this experiment shall have been tried. I thank you heartily for your most useful services to H. J., and of course will try to see you at I hope no very distant date.

Very sincerely yours,
(signed) Wm. James

P. S. I ought to tell you that your advice in my daughter's case—you may remember that my wife took her to consult you about threatenings of appendicitis, (you refused all fee!!) was fully corroborated by events. She was rather "run down" after two years of college, and with the resumption of good nervous tone, her iliac pains have quite disappeared, as you prophesied they probably would. Thanks again!

